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ABSTRACT

The efforts of Vassar College and Cornell University in their early years (1865-1890) to manage problems presented by underprepared students are described. Based on archival materials, registers, institutional publications, and histories, attention is directed to the perceptions of administrators, faculty, students, and alumni concerning academic inadequacy. The way each institution tried to create and project its public image is considered, along with the internal discourse of each institution in relation to academic quality. In addition to reviewing perceptions of institutional image, the rhetoric and reality of academic excellence involved in institutional image building are addressed. For example, the images set forth in catalogs as well as the policies enacted by faculty and administrators are described. Also considered are institutional strategies developed to manage the institution's image by controlling academic deficiencies among students and by limiting instruction in subcollegiate areas. While Vassar reorganized its curriculum and provided needed preparatory studies, Cornell did not offer preparatory studies but dealt with academically deficient students on a case by case basis. Both colleges expanded educational opportunities to a broader base of students than had previously been served. (SW)

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Managing Academic Deficiency: A Microanalysis of 19th Century Image Making in American Higher Education

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This paper was presented at the Annual Meeting of the Association for the Study of Higher Education held at the Gunter Hotel in San Antonio, Texas, February 20-23, 1986. This paper was reviewed by ASHE and was judged to be of high quality and of interest to others concerned with the research of higher education. It has therefore been selected to be included in the ERIC collection of ASHE conference papers.

Egalitarianison and excellence enjoy a tradition of creative tension in American higher education. Historically driven by a curious desire to provide equal opportunity and access and simultaneously to maintain educational excellence, high standards, and respectable quality many of our colleges and universities continuously have been poised between trying to be all things to all people and attempting to be distinctive. Jeffersonian and Jacksonian democracy as well as the search for excellence characterize our diverse and complex system of higher education and have done historically.

Today's educational reform movement has called both public and professional attention to defining the appropriate relationship between educational egalitarianism and educational excellence. This reformation is similar to previous educational revivals, such as the reform of the late nineteenth century when old time colleges, emerging universities, and new institutions struggled to define themselves by upgrading standards and elevating academic quality. At the micro-level within the specific institutional contexts, managing academic deficiencies has played a significant and usually supporting role in the reform process. Colleges and universities have long known the challenges presented by the need to project a positive image and to control for quality while simultaneously admitting academically inadequate students. This study presents a microanalysis of two such cases. It examines Vassar College and Cornell University between 1865 to 1890. Focused on Vassar and Cornell's efforts to manage the problems of academic shortcomings presented by underprepared students, the research considers how each institution tried to create and project its public image. In addition, it looks at the internal discourse of each institution in relation to academic quality. Through a

historical analysis of archival materials, registers, institutional publications and histories institutional perceptions of academic inadequacy are discussed. The perceptions are those of the administrators, faculty, students, and alumni. Along with reviewing these perceptions of institutional image, the study examines the rhetoric and the reality of academic excellence involved in institutional image building. Data sources include documents used for both internal and external purposes. For example, the images set forth in the catalogues as well as the policies enacted by faculty and administrators will be examined. Finally, the research identifies and analyzes institutional strategies developed to manage image by controlling academic deficiencies among students and by limiting instruction in subcollegiate" areas. This historical study focuses on Vassar College and Cornell University as new institutions in their quests for quality by looking at each school's confrontation with its academic inadequacies and its need to create and maintain an image of academic excellence.

The Vassar College Case

Upon first opening its doors in September of 1865, Vassar College was faced with the question of how to manage academic deficiencies and at the same time how to project an image of academic credibility and respectability. Ten years later reflecting back on the colleges unsettling beginning, President John Howard Raymond said, "It is easy to build a college on paper. To produce the real thing is not so easy." (1876) Raymond was no stranger to the problems involved in managing academic deficiencies and creating a positive public image. Delivering on the college's initial claim to offer the highest elevation of collegiate education equal to the best higher education available

at the best of the men's colleges was easier said than done (Vassar College, Circular, 1864) as Vassar's faculty and administration found throughout its first twenty-five years.

Prior to its opening, Vassar promoted itself as exacting the highest standards (Vassar College, Circular, 1864; Jewett). However, the rhetoric of high standards was put to an immediate test when the diverse body of first students, all three hundred and fifty of them, presented themselves to sit for the entrance examination in the elementary English branches including: spelling, reading, writing, arithmetric, geography, English grammar, and the history of the United States. Although Vassar's planners had anticipated that some students would have deficiencies in Latin, French, and Algebra, they definitely were not prepared for the extent of students' academic inadequacies (Vassar College, Annual Report 1866).

The vast majority of Vassar's first students demonstrated that they were grossly unprepared for Vassar's curriculum. In addition, President Raymond and the faculty were overwhelmed by the amount of time, effort, and energy which were required to reorganize the college's educational plans and to mobilize the college's resources into realistic and functional structures and provisional operating plans. Strategic regrouping was necessary in order to bring "a fair degree of order" out of the existing "chaos" (Warner, 1888) which Vassar's first women managed to create with the revelation of their academic deficiencies and the diversity of their scholastic preparation (Taylor, 1914). Thus began Vassar College's twenty-three year experience with managing academic deficiencies through preparatory education. Although it possessed most of the requisite ingredients for the making of a truly

collegiate institution such as modern buildings, a magnificient campus, up-to-date apparatus, well equipped cabinets, the beginnings of a well-developed library, a learned faculty, and a plan for organization and education [Vassar College, Circular, 1864] the college lacked a most basic ingredient, acadmically prepared students.

In reporting to the Trustees, Raymond lamented that in spite of the college's high goals and excellent offerings, the firt students' educational attainment represented "every grade ... from that of a respectable College Junior down to a point lower" than there was "any convenient way of indicating". Raymond further described the situation as an "emergency" with "multifarious elements" because the students "were deplorably destitute of any educational foundation". Within Vassar's first week, as the entrance examination results "developed themselves," President Raymond "had abandoned all idea of a formal class arrangement" for the first year. Further, he had "resolved to class them [the students], one by one, according to their degrees of proficiency in the several departments to which they were admitted." This tedious and time-consuming task required "minute, laborious, and vexatious detail" not to be wished on one's worst enemy (Vassar College, Annual Report, 1866).

As President Raymond's rhetoric in the Annual Report suggests, the academic deficiencies presented by the college's first women stimulated alarm. By falling significantly short of the college planners' academic expections the students challenged the new college at its very core. How could Vassar offer the highest elevation of higher education to students, "more than two thirds" of whom failed to meet the entrance requirements?

President Raymond opted for a provisional plan of action which he and the faculty believed would serve the short term. Although some faculty and students argued that the college's original standards should be upheld, Raymond contended that the college should take students as they were and work "with providence to improve them." President Raymond found it necessary to adjust Vassar's requirements and admit unqualified students "on financial grounds and with a view to the impression on the public mind. Vassar was caught between the need to be a truly collegiate institution and the need for students. Without the more than three hundred women Vassar had been designed for, it would have been fiscally impossible to operate the college. Although Raymond's decision was pragmatic, he warned the trustees against the "claims of the Business Department" being "premitted to press upon the educational (Vassar College, Annual Report, 1866).

The college's financial need for students was strong. Matthew Vassar's gift literally built and equipped the college in addition to establishing an endowment. However, operating revenues had to be generated by enrollment. Tuition dollars were to be the primary source of revenue needed to operate and maintain the college. More than three hundred students were required to produce enough funds. To reject over two thirds of the first applicants would have meant financial disaster for the new college (Vassar College, Annual Report, 1866). In order to adhere to the standards the college initially set, over two-thirds of the students would have had to be rejected. President Raymond along with many faculty thought the college could in no way afford to take such action. Similar to many of today's colleges, Vassar was enrollment driven and remained so throughout its early history. From an administrative

perspective need for tuition dollars and high standards were strong but unequal opponents. Dollars were essential for exacting the standards.

Financial realities were not the sole set of motivators influencing the relaxation of admission and academic standards. A sensitivity toward the public's opinion of the college also drove the early decision to admit and accommodate unqualified students. In referring to the college's "view to the impression on the public mind," Raymond was identifying the college's public image as an important ingredient in decision making and planning. Since Vassar's mission to educate women on a collegiate level was a break with tradition, close attention to the public's impression of the enterprise was particularly important. In order to attract the much needed students, the college relied on the public's support. How the public viewed the new institution influenced the college's ability to attract students and advocates among educators as well as the general population. Opposition to the education of girls was popular, and Vassar had to face this head-on. From the college's inception, President Raymond was well aware of the need to court the public and to maintain a strong positive image in its eyes. For Vassar to make the case for the higher education of women to the public, it had to have the women to teach. If women were underprepared for the college curriculum, Vassar would prepare them, because the opportunities for preparatory education for women were limited.

A careful review of institutional records and President Raymond's reports and papers makes it clear that the problem of Vassar's students' lacking academic proficiencies was considered to be a temporary but necessary embarrassment generated by Vassar's being a new college serving a heretofore unserved population. President Raymond and the Vassar faculty hoped that

better prepared students would come to Vassar in sufficient number to produce the revenue needed to meet operating expenses and thus eliminate the need to accept unqualified students. However, in its third year of operation, Vassar College devoted a section of the Catalogue to "Preparatory Studies" for students who were "imperfectly" prepared to meet the college's requirements (Vassar College Catalogue, 1967-1868). From its third year, 1867-1868 through 1888 Vassar College catalogues included sections on the college's preparatory offerings as well as lists of preparatory students. Thus, from 1867, Vassar College publicized its preparatory education efforts. The clearly stated public advertisement of Vassar's providing opportunities for "young ladies who were not up to the required grade in their studies" unequivocally moved the college's preparatory education efforts from the realm of stopgap problem-solving to longer term educational programming (Vassar College, Annual Report, 1869). What Raymond and the faculty had viewed at the college's opening as a remedy to a temporary problem by 1867 clearly had evolved into an unpleasant and persistent reality.

Preparatory education efforts quickly evolved into Vassar's unwanted academy. As a resource dependent and new institution, Vassar College needed the tuition produced by strong, stable enrollments. However, in its early years, the college was unable to attract an adequate number of academically prepared students for its "regular" college curriculum. Thus, Vassar's administration reluctantly but consciously accommodated the applicants who could provide the much needed operating revenue. In effect, Vassar used preparatory students to fill in enrollment gaps. This practice reached its apex in 1875-1876, when Vassar's "Regular" college enrollment decreased and preparatory students increased.

Over a ten year period beginning in 1866, the preparatory enrollment at Vassar grew both in absolute numbers and in the percentage of the total enrollment represented by preparatory students. In 1866, seventy-eight preparatory students composed approximately twenty percent of Vassar's total enrollment. Ten years later, in 1876, preparatory students numbered one hundred and sixty-six students. Further, they represented almost forty-five percent of the total enrollment. Table 1 illustrates Vassar's enrollment relationships in terms of Regular, Special, Preparatory, and Total enrollments for the period from 1866 through 1888, the final year of the preparatory department. "Regular" enrollment represented students in the college level curriculum. The "Special" classification included students taking selected courses but not matriculated in a college curriculum. The "Preparatory" category of students involved those individuals who were not academically qualified for the "regular" college curriculum. Students in all enrollment categories, however, were Vassar College students.

TABLE 1

Preparatory Enrollment in Relation to Regular and Total Enrollment

VASSAR COLLEGE STUDENT DISTRIBUTION

Academic Year	#Regular Students	#Special Students	#Preparatory Students	# Total	%Preparatory Total
1866-'67	197	189	78	386	20.20%
1867-'68	216	123	85	339	25.07%
1868-'69	290	72	139	362	38.39%
1869-'70	323	59	167	382	43.71%
1870-'71	316	65	151	381	39.63%
1871-'72	356	58	151	415	36.39%
1872-'73	370	41	135	411	32.85%
1873-'74	390	21	146	411	35.52%
1874-'75	214	11	159	384	41.41%
1875-'76	183	20	166	370	44.86%
1876-'77	182	23	132	338	39.05%
1877-'78	177	33	118	347	34.01%
1878-'79	171	26	84	306	27.45%
1879-'80	164	18	86	303	28.38%
1880-'81	146	28	69	284	24.30%
1881-'82	145	30	82	297	27.61%
1882-'83	145	28	80	314	25.48%
1883-'84	147	26	63	300	21%
1884-'85	144	21	51	275	18.55%
1885-'86	151	35	50	291	17.18%
1886-'87	162	43	43	312	13.78%
1887-'88	170	45	27	294	9.18%

In the Annual Report of 1876, President Raymond expressed grave concern over the upward trend in preparatory enrollment. Raymond stressed to the trustees that a longitudinal comparison of enrollment data suggested a "far more serious fact" than enrollment declines and increases. Enrollment data indicated that the "character of the institution" was changing. Shifts toward an increased preparatory enrollment pointed to Vassar's becoming an institution of "an unqualified college grade." Raymond argued that if Vassar continued to admit increasing numbers of preparatory students vis a vis decreasing or constant numbers of regular students "within seven years the character and function of Vassar would be settled as that of a great preparatory school of a secondary grade, fitting students for the colleges." Based on his enrollment-trend analysis, Raymond called for Vassar College to change before it was too late. He urged the trustees to rid the college of its growing unwanted academy which was not an "integral part of the institution, but an accidental appendage." Further, Raymond called on the board to lead a "second founding of Vassar," to redefine Vassar as a genuine college (Vassar College, Annual Report, 1876).

President Raymond was not alone in his desire to eliminate preparatory education and its "inferior" students from the college. Vassar students and alumnae protested against the embarrassing presence of "prep" students. Vassar students expressed hope that it would not be long before "Preparatories shall be a thing of the past, and the College will be filled with students pursing the regular course." In a similar vein, an alumna writing for the Miscellany urged all "friends of Vassar" not to keep silent but to protest continuously until the "reproach is wiped away." In addition, the alumna

referred to the Preparatory Department as "only a morbid growth, eating out the life and vigor of the academic body (Vassar College Miscellany, July 1872). Indeed, the alumnae turned their verbal protest into a call for action. In a January 1877 Vassar Miscellany article, alumnae were urged to take positive steps to help rid the college of its preparatory department. Alumnae were called upon to "work in establishing preparatory schools for Vassar" which would not only pretend to do, but would do, "the necessary work" of preparing students for Vassar (Vassar College Miscellany, July 1877). Given adequate preparatory opportunities outside of Vassar, the college could dispense with the "grim necessity" of preparing its own students.

Without question, the Preparatory Department was considered to drain not only Vassar's image but also its resources. The Historical Sketch of Vassar College, prepared for the national centennial, identified two serious problems associated with the college's operating a preparatory program. First, the preparatory studies program was said to tax the faculty. Because the preparatory students required such care, the Preparatory Department seriously discounted "the teaching force of the Faculty." Faculty who wanted to be teaching college level courses and students instead experienced the frustration of dealing with immature students and teaching sub-collegiate courses. Often teachers had to provide discipline and supervision to Vassar's sub-Freshmen, thus taking them away from the scholarly task of collegiate instruction. Secondly, the presence of preparatory students had a negative impact on Vassar's "regular" college students. The Historical Sketch stated that the presence of "so large a number of immature pupils" resulted in "materially" abridging "the advantages for effective study" for the college

students (Historical Sketch of Vassar College, 1876). The presence of the preparatory students detracted from the environment of academic seriousness Vassar, as a "truly collegiate" institution, wanted. All too often "preps" lacked the degree of academic purpose required by college. Prep students frequently acted in ways which suggested they were inadequately socialized for college life as well as insufficiently prepared for the curricular requirements.

While not indicated by any of Vassar College's official records, Frances A. Wood, music teacher and subsequently librarian at Vassar, posited that Vassar's "regular" or college students formed "a sort of aristocracy." In contrast, the faculty of the Preparatory Department would refer to themselves as "only prep, teacher[s]." (Wood, 1909). Wood's view of "regular" students and preparatory faculty suggests an informal student/faculty class system. Wood's observation, perhaps not without bias, implies that there was a subtle, informal, but, nevertheless real stratification of Vassar's early faculty. The more basic the subjects taught and the less academically proficient the students, the lower the status of the faculty member teaching them. Faculty were judged and judged themselves by what they taught, at what level, and to whom. Teachers of the academically elite were viewed as the elite faculty. Conversely, teachers of the scholastically deficient risked being perceived as deficient faculty.

Vassar's college level students also found Vassar's public image as an academic minotaur, half college, half academy, far from desirable. The Vassar Miscellany, the student newspaper, is filled with negative assessments of Vassar's involvement in preparatory education. Further, the Miscellany

repeatedly served as a vehicle for criticizing and mocking preparatory students. According to a Miscellany editorial in July of 1877, Vassar had "no means of defense" against attacks on the quality of the college caused by the presence and/or behavior of preparatory students. The editorial contended that individuals were known "to turn their whole influence against the College" because of the negative image projected by "some weak, and silly" girls who were "prep" students but misrepresented themselves as Vassar College students (Vassar College Miscellany, July 1877). Preparatory students frequently identified themselves as Vassar upperclassmen, much to the embarrassment of the Vassar community. "Prep" students referred to as "inferior forms" (Vassar College Miscellany, July 1872) also gained recognition as a "vandal horde...bent only upon asserting themselves and their tastes, to the general discomforts of those who must needs to come in contact with them." In addition, "preps" were viewed as "unconventionalities" who brought discomfort and embarrassment to the college (Vassar College Miscellany, July 1882). From the perspective of many of Vassar's college students, the "preps" were the academic step-sisters, the Cinderella's of Vassar.

Clearly the inappropriate behavior and embarrassment to the college caused by preparatory students generated concern among Vassar's faculty and administration. "Prep" students were aware that they were a source of concern, dissatisfaction, and disappointment to the faculty and administration. Bertha Keefer, one of Vassar's early "prep" students noted that preps were lectured on their causing the college public embarrassment by their immaturity and unacceptable behavior. Keefer indicated that President Raymond spoke to the students about the strong relationship between their

academic proficiences, their behavior, and the college's reputation. From Raymond's perspective, inadequate scholastic achievement and preparation, endemic to the preparatory students, meant immature behavior and a negative impact on Vassar's reputation. In an address to Vassar's "prep" students recounted by Keefer, President Raymond called on all "preps" to be "loyal" to Vassar and not to cause the college embarrassment. Keefer wrote that she guessed "something disloyal in his sense of the word came up in [the] Faculty meeting Yesterday." According to Keefer, each time the Vassar faculty met "something new" about problems caused by "preps" would be discussed. Subsequently President Raymond would lecture the preparatory students on the problem the faculty had discussed (Keefer, Unpublished Manuscript).

While Keefer offers a preparatory student's point of view, Mary Norris reflecting on her days as one of Vassar's early students presented a differing perspective on "preps." Norris recalled that the college's reputation frequently "suffered from thoughtless girls not students by nature" whose only "idea of smartness was to outwit their teachers." According to Norris, the scholastically unqualified students, the "preps" were "dead weight on the students and the governing body" (Norris, 1915). Without question, the preps took a considerable amount of time, attention, and resources away from the college's true mission, the higher education of women.

From Vassar's inception, the college started weaning the academically underprepared students and the educational program in their behalf from the main body of the college. This process began with the classification of "unclassified" students in 1866 and ended in 1888 with the termination of the Preparatory Department. During this period, there was a constant tension

between Vassar's efforts to refine preparatory education and to eliminate it from the college. What began as a provisional plan to remediate and manage the academic deficiencies of Vassar's first students evolved into a full scale department under the auspices of Vassar but segregated from the college.

Throughout the twenty-three years Vassar formally engaged in the management of academic deficiencies by preparatory education, it also struggled to keep a positive image before the public. Although the internal rhetoric of the college spoke of "grim necessities", "embarrassment" "inferior forms," "unconventionalities," a "weight" on the college's "progress" from which nothing but a "bold policy" would set it free (Vassar College, Annual Report, 1886), the external rhetoric the college used in attempting to create a public image was always positive. In its public communication the college stressed its commitment to standards. Further, it defended its preparatory efforts by arguing it was "compelled to perform" them since adequate and appropriate preparatory opportunities were not available to women (Orton, 1871). Until such time as women could be prepared to attend Vassar College in a secondary school, the college did its own preparatory work. However, during this period, 1868 to 1888, Vassar chose to project its image as that of a college which coincidently engaged in preparatory education. Indeed, Vassar consciously worked at making its image positive by managing the education it offered its academically dificient students and by continuously elevating its requirement.

The Cornell University Case

Similar to Vassar's first days, the opening of Cornell was eventful and exciting. Hopeful Cornell applicants converged on the university at the end

of September in 1868. Their number far exceeded the university's expectations. In fact, Cornell's first class was the largest ever admitted to any American institution of higher education up to that time. Four hundred and twelve students met the requirements, and sixty applicants were rejected. Those who were not admitted failed to meet the requirements stated in the first university Register. Applicants needed to "pass a thoroughly satisfactory examination" in Geography, English Grammar, including Orthography and Syntax, Arithmetic and Algebra to Quadratic Equations. Additional examinations were required of some applicants depending on their proposed course of study. In addition to passing the examinations, candidates for admission also were "required to be at least fifteen years of age, to be of good character, and to be possessed of such physical health and strength as will enable them to pursue the studies of the course which they propose to enter" (The Cornell Register, 1868-1869).

During the early days at Cornell a strong tension existed between the rhetoric of academic excellence the university espoused and the reality of academic excellence it experienced. Founder Era Cornell's motto that he "would found an institution where any person can find instruction in any study" belied the stress on quality (The Cornell Register, 1869-1870). Mr. Cornell's egalitarian philosophy was a source of tension and even conflict with President Andrew Dickson White's desire to build a "great university." Although White's plan was more persistent, in the university's formative stage of development from 1868 to 1890 the "any person" "any study" orientation created its share of problems by promoting an image of the university as capable of being all things to all people.

At the same time the university was attempting to expand access to higher education to the sons and daughters of farmers and mechanics, it also was trying to be academically selective in its admissions. Having rejected almost thirteen percent of its first applicants, Cornell, indeed, exercised a degree of academic selectivity uncommon in late nineteenth century American colleges and universities. From its inception, Cornell University was unique. As neither a purely private nor a solely public university, Cornell had elements of both a private and a public institution. Given this unique status, a question arises as to what institutions might Cornell be compared fairly. If compared to some of the eastern men's colleges, Cornell's admission standards would be less rigorous. However, if compared to the emerging state colleges, Cornell's admission requirements would be more demanding. In addition, Cornell did apply different admission standards to applicants for different courses of study. For example, individuals applying to the Course in Arts had additional requirements in mathematics as well as in Latin and Greek. Thus, the requirements for the Course in Arts equalled or exceeded those in most institutions of higher education of the post civil war era.

For Cornell University, the years between 1868 and 1890 were marked by a search for identity. Although in 1868 when Cornell opened its doors it had a well developed plan of organization in place, it was nonetheless an unfinished institution, a university in a quest for definition. In its infancy, Cornell was faced with the task of clearly defining itself for itself and for the public. The question before Cornell was to what extent it must provide any student, any study. Ezra Cornell's desire to found an institution of higher learning which would be all things to all people generated a considerable

amount of institutional tension n the early days. According to Laurence Veysey, the central question which Cornell University faced in its first years "was how far in fact it would bend toward the 'low' or grass-roots version of practical mindedness" (Veysey, 1965), implicit in Mr. Cornell's motto to found an institution where any person could find instruction in any study. The challenge of melding the liberal and the practical, the theoretical and the applied, and the scholarly and the functional steadily persisted in putting itself before Cornell's faculty and administration throughout the university's early history. In meeting this challenge, Cornell developed a working definition for itself and its public which came about by means of "a steady evolution in the general conception of the university" (White, 1907) as outlined in President White's inaugural address (The Cornell Register, 1869-1870). The university, in fact, publicly gave expression to its early definition as it evolved in a work entitled The Cornell University. What It Is and What It Is Not, which the university published in 1872.

Initially Cornell had to develop a working definition of itself in the context of its programs and students. Although selective in its admission practices, the university had its share of academically underprepared students. Unlike many late nineteenth century colleges which had preparatory departments, from its inception Cornell University officially had no preparatory opportunities for the less proficient students. In fact, the university Register of 1868 explicitly stated Cornell's position on its role in relation to the underprepared student. Under the heading of "The University System," the Register attempted to clarify the nature of a Cornell education and to dispel misconceptions of what it was. First, the Register

declared, "The University is not a school for instruction in preliminary English branches." The proper institution for such elementary instruction was the common school or the academy, not Cornell University. Second, the Register admonished that "Too much care cannot be given to fundamental preparation." In order to pass the university's entrance examinations, all applicants needed to be well versed in the elementary English branches. An unprepared applicant stood a reasonable chance of being rejected by Cornell. Third, the Register asserted, "The University maintains no preparatory department." However, the university did admit applicants with slight academic deficiencies. Further, it conditioned these students and required that the conditions be met within a specified period of time. Students were to get tutoring from preparatory schools in Ithaca, tutors they hired, on their own, or from advanced Cornell students. Fourth, the Register stated, "The University is not a reform establishment." Cornell was not intended to change characters, but rather to stimulate minds, to educate. Finally, the Register proclaimed that "The University is open to students of any State or Country." This was Cornell's statement of equal opportunity (The Cornell Register, 1868-1869). This five-point statement was incorporated in various forms into The Cornell Register for many years to come.

The university held firm in its position on the role of the university in relation to unqualified students. This is not to say that Cornell had no underprepared students in its early years. However, it is to say that in presenting its scholastic image to the public, Cornell emphasized its academic standards rather than the educational opportunities it offered academically deficient students. For example, in Cornell University. What It Is and What

It Is Not, Cornell stressed its high "standard of scholarship" by comparing itself positively to institutions such as Harvard, Yale, and the University of Michigan. In insisting that Cornell had no need to lower admission standards, the university said, "Whatever is set down or required at the Cornell examinations is really required." Accordingly, Cornell experienced "No such necessity for increasing the number of students as to make it advisable to slur over the entrance and term examinations" (Cornell University, 1872). In fact, Cornell's records show that the university did admit students who did not fully meet requirements. From its opening, this practice was not uncommon. Indeed, the academic realities at Cornell differed from the rhetoric the university used in describing itself to the public.

At the beginning of academic year 1869-1870, one of the first actions of the Cornell faculty was to establish a systematic method for dealing with applicants who were considered to be academically marginal. The "Faculty Minutes" for September 15, 1869, indicated the establishment of a faculty committee, referred to as the "Committee on Doubtful Cases." This presidentially-appointed committee had five members including: the Registrar Professors Russel, Evans, Sprague, and Morris. The purpose of the Committee on Doubtful Cases was to review and to "decide upon doubtful cases of application for admission" (Cornell University, "Faculty Minutes," 1869). The creation of this committee was in response to the experience of Cornell's first year when the whole faculty dealt individually with each questionable admissions case. By delegating the task of reviewing these cases to a committee, the faculty was freed from what had proven to be a time-consuming assignment the previous year.

The creation of the Committee on Doubtful Cases did not put an end to the faculty's involvement in evaluating students' petitions. The Cornell faculty frequently reviewed students' requests for exceptions to academic policy. In fact, the "Faculty Minutes" between 1868 and 1890 are filled with numerous examples of this practice. For example, on September 29, 1869, the faculty considered and subsequently accepted the request of a student rejected in the classical course to be admitted as a special student in literature (Cornell University, "Faculty Minutes", 1869). This type of request was particularly common. Students rejected in one course of study often petitioned the faculty to be admitted as special students or as optional students in other areas of study.

Rejection was a fact of life at Cornell from its first day. It generated concern among those applicants who were identified as the chosen and disappointment among those who failed to meet Cornell's requirements. For many of those students who were rejected, however, the Cornell faculty approved their acceptance into other courses of study. The Registers do not discuss this reconsideration option. Its existence did not receive official notice in the university's public rhetoric, although the "Faculty Minutes" reveal that the option was exercised with a high degree of regularity, thus implying widespread knowledge of the possibility of a second chance of acceptance into the university.

Another type of petition commonly brought before the Cornell faculty was the request to modify degree requirements in order to allow a student to graduate. These cases usually involved academic deficiencies on the part of the students. Each of these cases was given individual consideration by the

entire faculty. Although it could be said that Cornell never relaxed its degree requirements in its early years, it also could be said that the university did make individual exceptions to the standard policy. For example, the Cornell faculty carefully reviewed the case of Mr. D. on 24 June 1870. After evaluating the particulars of Mr. D.'s case, the faculty resolved that "Mr. D.'s deficiency in Greek shall not be an obstacle to his receiving the degree of A.B" (Cornell University, "Faculty Minutes", 1870). Thus, the faculty did not alter the degree requirements in general but rather adjusted them in an individual instance.

During the period between 1868 and 1890, admission requirements were raised regularly. President White discussed the impact of the continuously increasing admission requirements of the early years in his Report to the trustees in 1871. White observed that in spite of the fact that Cornell University "constantly raised" the standard of the entrance examination, enrollment increased and the academic achievement of the students improved. Mr. White attributed the increase and improvement to several factors. First, White noted that the "examination papers provided in the University Register show that we exact close study" (Cornell University, President's Report, 1871). Unlike many of its contemporaries, Cornell printed sample entrance examinations in its Register. This practice provided applicants with a practical guide for preparation. As a second reason, White pointed out that Cornell students as a rule had "little money to waste." They had to work hard and had little time for play. Next, the president identified the fact that Cornell students were "generally from the country." Their interests and lifestyles were simple unlike those of many individuals from big cities.

White also suggested that the increase in the age requirement worked to Cornell's benefit. From White's perspective, another factor which helped Cornell in its first years were the numerous attacks on the university, because these attacks eliminated many of "the weakly" from applying to Cornell. Finally, White proposed that Cornell's manner of treating students as adults rather than boys had positive results for the university as well as the students. It encouraged better behavior on the part of students and attracted a more mature, more responsible, self-directed student (Cornell University, President's Report, 1871).

From an opposite point of view, an editorial in the student newspaper, The Cornell Era, stated "As a general rule students lack application." The editorial continued by elaborating on the many negative habits students at Cornell developed in the place of academic application. Among these habits were "walking the streets, accosting friends with agreeable twaddle and jocosely talking about election results." When examinations come, however, these individuals find "they cannot walk through them." Sometimes, as a result of lack of academic application, students find themselves on condition the next term (The Cornell Era, 20 January 1870).

Another edition of The Cornell Era addressed the issue of admission standards and unqualified students. In an editorial, the practice of admitting academically deficient students to the University of Michigan was criticized and questioned. Cornell students favored adherence to strict admission standards. The editorial strongly stated Cornell's position:

> But when the only possible benefit--and though we did not see it at first sight, we will allow it--is the collection of tuition fees from soft headed or indifferent applicants for a collegiate education, we must say that in our opinion the end is, though not unworthy, at least insignificant compared with the means, and regret that the step has been taken (The Cornell Era, 26 May 1871).

During the early years, The Cornell Era frequently addressed the issues of admission standards as well as academic standards. In these editorials and articles, the student writers always took the side of high standards and used the rhetoric of academic excellence.

The university's first years provided a great deal of evidence that the general perception inside Cornell was that the univerity standards were getting tougher and its students were getting better. However, these years also were marked by some indications to the contrary. For example, in January of 1871, The Cornell Era reported that forty-six freshmen were conditioned in Physiology. Of those students, "thirty-seven form a special class to receive extra lectures" (The Cornell Era, 20 January 1871). This practice of providing extra instruction as a remedy for academic deficiency was not uncommon at Cornell. Similarly, on September 15, 1869, the faculty voted to establish a subsection of Algebra for candidates who had "passed satisfactorily in their other studies" but who fell short in Algebra (Cornell University, "Faculty Minutes," 1875).

The university did not ignore the deficiencies of its students. At the same time, Cornell did not want to project an image of academic weakness. In fact, President White expressed concern for Cornell's educational image given the caliber of some of its students (Cornell University, President's Report, 1869). Within the institutional context, discussions of students' academic

deficiencies enjoyed regular attention. While to its external environment, the university spoke of its high academic standards.

As the university matured, a change in the manner the Cornell faculty handled questions of academic exception occurred. Initially cases of students requesting modifications or exceptions to academic policy and practice were considered individually by the faculty. By 1872, these cases, rather than being presented to the entire faculty, were referred to appropriate faculty members for review. In addition to this change, by 1875 a new trend had begun. The faculty started dealing with students more in groups. For example, the June 16, 1875, "Faculty Minutes" indicated the "Committee on the Matter of Conditioned Students" put restrictions, conditions of passing examinations not on individuals, but on classes of individuals (Cornell University, "Faculty Minutes, 1875). These changes reflected the growing complexity of academic administration and the development of effective mechanisms for administering academic policy. As the committees' names suggest, academic excellence was not the only reality the university experienced. In the early stages of its development, the university had to deal with "doubtful cases" and "conditioned students."

While the university internally was trying to resolve issues of "doubtful cases" and "conditioned students", externally its standards of scholarship were being questioned. The reason for this was coeducation. In the public arena, the university defended itself from numerous attacks on its commitment to coeducation. The introduction of women into the university stimulated speculation of the lowering of standards. In response to this negative

criticism, The Era presented many editorials and articles about the effects of the admission of women. According to the Era, the perception that the admission of women meant "the lowering of standards" was a delusion. Further, the Era stated that the belief that coeducation results in decreased standards of admission and scholarship, in fact, was contrary to the evidence. In those institutions of secondary and higher education where coeduation existed, standards did not plummet. Indeed, standards were not decreased (The Cornell Era, 13 September 1872). Cornell admitted women "on the same conditions as young men, except that they must be at least eighteen years of age" (The Cornell Register, 1872-1873). Thus, the minimum age for admission was higher for women than for men. On that basis, all other admission criteria being equal, it could be said that admission standards were higher for women at Cornell. The academic caliber of Cornell's early women quickly put an end to the criticism of coeducation which suggested that the admission of women meant a lowering of standards. In the coeducation case, the rhetoric and the reality of academic excellence were congruent. High acadmeic standards were practiced as well as preached.

Throughout its early years, Cornell's continuous raising of admission standards provided regular opportunities for the university to deal with questions of academic excellence. Reflecting on the raising of the admission standards, The Era of 28 September 1877 reported that no one could doubt the benefit of the increased requirements. "As a result, candidates for admission are better prepared and more capable of carrying on the work assigned them" (The Cornell Era, 28 September 1877). The 1 February 1877 Era cautioned against the raising of admission standards if it simply meant "the necessity

on the part of the student grinding out a greater number of text books before he comes to college, and does not indicate a change in the character of the work in college." The Era continued that this clearly was not the case at Cornell where the standards were being raised constantly. In consequence of this elevation, "the courses have been somewhat changed, so that the purpose seems to be to raise the college course to a higher level, and to make the certificate of graduation of greater value (The Cornell Era, 1 February 1877). On the same point, Acting President Russel reported to the board that "never however have we had such good scholarship in the mass" (Cornell University, President's Report, 1879).

In contrast, President White in his annual Report in 1882 analyzed the causes for the larger enrollments of students in Cornell's early years. White posited the reasons for such large enrollments. First among them was "the low standard of requirements for admission then enforced." In addition, Cornell's "not knowing what . . . [its] work was to be" contributed to requirements being "very low." These factors "attracted large numbers who might better have been receiving instruction in high schools and academies" (Cornell University, Presidents Report, 1882).

From the perspective of the Era, although increased standards at Cornell were supported and promoted, it was advised that the elevation of entrance requirements should be made within a reasonable limit. Requirements should be developed within the limits of the preparatory opportunities available to applicants. These limits should be maintained "at least until there are better schools to bridge over the gap between them and a great share of the common schools of the present time." The Era reporter concluded by stating

that increases in requirements should bear a direct relation to the instruction offered in the university, "for the true purpose of entrance examinations is not to exclude, but to measure the proficiency of applicants" (The Cornell Era, 1 February 1877). In fact, improved instruction in the university is what occurred. Increased admission requirements gave "the student more time for instruction in the University and the result is that fewer enter, a larger percentage graduate" (Cornell University, President's Report, 1881).

Although retention rates were said to increase as standards of admission were raised, students who fell short of Cornell's high academic expectations persisted through and beyond 1890. Evidence of this is abundant in the departmental reports appended to the Presidents' Reports. In 1886, Rhetoric Professor Charles Chauncy Shackford reported that because of the quality of work done in the preparatory schools, "many students are admitted who can hardly write a simple sentence without committing some offence against the rules of good usage." Shackford recommended that preparatory schools should enforce "more rigid and elementary instruction." This in turn would produce "students better fitted to begin the work in composition and Rhetoric in the University" (Cornell University, President's Report, 1886). A similar perspective was shared by Professor Jacob Gould Schurman of Philosophy and Ethics. According to Schurman, "though some students did excellent work, all were hampered by a lack of preparation and a few were obliged to give up the course all together." Similarly, Professor Williams in the report on Geology and Paleontology noted that students lacked any preparation in geology, thus necessitating the most elementary instruction:

> I find that almost all the students entering this class have never taken systematic study in Geology, it is therefore essentially an elementary class.

Williams also indicated that the students represented an academically diverse group which posed instructional challenges for the faculty. According to Professor Williams' assessment of students, there were "great" differences "in the capacity of students to grasp the subject" (Cornell University, President's Report, 1887).

In addition to the faculty observations of persistent academic deficiencies among the Cornell student body, there were also many examples of positive observations of the students' academic proficiency. Professors Hewett and White of the German department noted that "the work offered is of a higher order each year." Of course, they attributed the elevated work to better prepared students, and thus improved secondary instruction. Dean Fuertes of Civil Engineering made a similar observation in stating that "the standard of scholarship maintained in this department has been very satisfactory" (Cornell University, President's Report, 1886). Professor Thurston, Director of Sibley College of Mechanical Engineering and the Mechanical Arts, optimistically proposed the future possibility of elevating the Mechanical Arts curriculum "by throwing out some of the elementary work in mathematics and perhaps in science" because of advances in instruction in these areas at the secondary school level (Cornell University, President's Report, 1887).

Between 1868 and 1890, Cornell University moved from its infancy into its childhood. From its inception, Cornell used the rhetoric of academic

standards and excellence when addressing the public, as in the case of the university registers. However, within the university, the rhetoric and the reality it reflected often indicated a quest for standards and excellence which was in progress but not yet realized. The academically unqualified student was well represented at Cornell in its early years. Further, the faculty and administration as well as the student body gave attention to these unqualified students and the related issues of academic quality and standards their presence represented.

Indeed, Cornell's commitment to both egalitarian access and academic selectivity produced a curious tension for and in the university. An examination of what Cornell said and did about academic standards between 1868 and 1890 provides some valuable insights into Cornell university as a developing institution. From this examination, it is clear that while attempting to define itself as an institution of higher learning, Cornell also was attempting to create a public image of academic excellence. A review and an analysis of the university's public documents, the Registers, the Era, and Cornell University. What It Is and What It Is Not reveal an image of Cornell as an institution totally committed to its standards. According to these publications, the university steadfastly adhered to its high academic standards and refused to entertain the option of academic compromise. However, a different image of Cornell emerges from an examination of the university's internal documents, the President's Reports and the Faculty Minutes. These documents clearly and unequivocally indicate that Cornell modified its standards on a case by case basis.

By dealing with individual exceptions to the standards, the university

managed to maintain its standards in the public's view. The fact that Cornell did not have a preparatory department and emphatically stated this in the Registers served to promote the university as being on a higher level than the average institution of higher learning of the period. A close examination of the internal documents provides evidence of many preparatory efforts within and targentially related to the university. The university actually spawned a preparatory school, the Cascadilla School which was founded by Cornell Professors McKoon and Wait to prepare students for the University. In addition, the university record establishes that special class sections were offered to remedy the academic deficiencies of the university's early students. Cornell indeed managed its academically deficient in an effort to control the university's public image.

Conclusions

As new institutions of higher education designed to serve new students whose preparatory opportunities were limited to non-existent, Vassar College and Cornell University both had to face the difficult question of how to manage academic deficiencies and simultaneously project to the public an image of high academic standards. Both Vassar and Cornell met this challenge differently, but nevertheless each confronted it. For Vassar the administrative decision was to reorganize its curriculum and thus provide the needed preparatory studies. For Cornell, the decision was to maintain its curriculum and not to offer formal preparatory studies. Whereas Vassar chose to adapt its curriculum, Cornell opted to keep its courses of study uncompromised. In communicating to the public through their registers both institutions made their positions on the management of underprepared students known. Vassar's

catalogues had sections on preparatory studies and the preparatory department under the "admission of students". However, the preparatory curriculum was not presented in the catalogue as other curricula were. The absence of a list and descriptions of preparatory courses is a conspicious absence, given the number of students enrolled as preparatory students. Throughout most of the period of this study, only two pages of catalogue space each year were devoted to the preparatory department, whereas much of the rest of the catalogue was devoted to the college programs along with claims of excellence and high standards. In contrast Cornell University registers included a section entitled the "University System" which stated in unequivocal terms that the university was not a school for elementary instruction or for preparatory instruction. However, Cornell's registers failed to state that students with academic deficiencies were dealt with on an individual basis. This omission reflects Cornell's deliberate attempts to create an image as well as the reality of a highly selective institution of higher education. Unlike many institutions of higher education of its day including Vassar College, Cornell chose the road less traveled and had no formal program of preparatory studies. Instead of operating a program to prepare and remediate students for the college level curricula, the university directed academically deficient students on a case by case basis to appropriate educational options such as to tutoring, extra class sessions, summer schools, etc.

Although Vassar and Cornell approached the problem of unqualified students differently, during the period of this study, each institution was well aware of the image problems associated with trying to educate these students in the context of higher education. Both organizations deliberated over the

embarrassment and frustration the presence of such students caused for the faculty, the more competent students, and the institution as a whole. Institutional records clearly and consistently indicate that the Vassar and the Cornell communities shared the perspective that the presence of underprepared students reflected negatively on the institutions' images with the public. In addition, these same students had less than positive impacts on the internal operation of both institutions according to the institutional records.

Although the academically inadequate were considered to be responsible for detracting from the academic reputation of Vassar and Cornell, frequently these students were presented in a humorous light in The Vassar Miscellany and The Cornell Era. Certainly the criticism of the presence of subcollegiate level students far outweighed the appreciation of them as a source of amusement in both institutions.

What surpassed the criticism and the mocking humor was the overriding desire for elevated standards, for improved educational quality. At both Vassar and Cornell, every year in the annual reports to the boards of trustees, the presidents noted the continual academic improvement of the students. Each year during the period of this study, students were reported to be scholastically better and more prepared than those of the previous year.

In part, the improvement in the academic proficiency of students was attributed to internal improvements in the institutions. However, it also was considered to be a function of improved and increased preparatory opportunities. Both Vassar and Cornell contributed to these changes for the better. By expanding the higher education opportunities to a broader base of students than previously had been served, each institution indirectly increased the

need for preparatory education. In addition, in a much more direct manner in the 1880's, Vassar and Cornell initiated "more intimate" relationships with secondary schools. Coorperation between both Vassar and Cornell and secondary schools produced many benefits including: greater understanding, improved and more appropriate preparation, more effective admission practices, and greater articulation between higher and secondary education.

For Vassar College, the preparatory students were a source of much needed revenue. Throughout its twenty-three-year history, Vassar's preparatory department was considered a financial necessity. From its first days, Vassar was dependent on academically underprepared students for tuition. Given the fact that Vassar was unable to find sufficient numbers of students adequately prepared, it decided to take its students where it found them and raise them to the desired level of proficiency. Once Vassar could find adequately prepared students it accelerated its efforts to eliminate the preparatory department. Cornell was not financially dependent on the underprepared student. Many more applicants came to Cornell than the university was able to accommodate adequately. It could afford to reject the least prepared. However, even given Cornell's record of rejecting applicants and students, the university provided a second chance for these students. They could petition the faculty to change their status to special or optional course students. In addition, Cornell admitted students on condition and frequently conditioned students once admitted. Thus, the admission and academic standards were not

adhered to as rigidly as was suggested by some of the university's publications, such as the registers and The Cornell Era. Cornell, like Vassar, desired retention over attrition and dismissal.

Although comparable data were not always available for Vassar College and Cornell University, a comparable management problem confronted both institutions. This management problem faces many contemporary institutions of higher education and thus is worthy of historical analysis. The question of how to create a positive academic image while serving underprepared students is a reoccurring one in American higher education. Many of today's institutions are struggling with this complex question. Contrary to popular belief, underprepared students did not make their debut in American colleges and universities in the 1960's. They have a long tradition in the history of American higher education.

As Professor John Thelin (1984) suggests college and university administration can be positively informed by historical microanalysis. While recordkeeping at nineteenth century Vassar and Cornell was uneven and much simpler than today's, it still provides valuable insights about the internal workings of these institutions. How these institutions coped, adapted, and responded to the complex problem of managing academic deficiency can help to inform how we deal with the problem today.

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